

KODIAK Xpedition

by Craig Murray

Combining Kodiak Leadership training with high adventure provides teens with a rich and exciting experience. For the past four years, Joe Garrett and I have been using the whitewater rapids out west as the venue for our Kodiak and Kodiak X training. We've had Venturers come from all across the United States: Virginia, Florida, Michigan, California, Arizona, Nevada and Washington.

One aspect of our program has been the development of young adults into leaders of the trek itself. This year, Whitney, a member of Crew 360 and a whitewater guide instructor, directed the whitewater guide training and took responsibility for the overall trek. Brenna, also a member of the same Crew, served as Assistant Director of instruction for both Kodiak and Kodiak X. Brenna worked with an adult, Carol Murray, to teach Kodiak X, and select and train the Kodiak instructors for two Kodiak Crews. The four Kodiak instructors she selected were also youth: Kristi and Kyla were instructors for one Crew, and Ryan and Lucas for the other.



Brenna & Whitney



Kristi and Kyla

Lucas, Ryan and Whitney

This year we decided to take our program to another level and provide whitewater guide training as well as

Wilderness First Aid to the Venturers who attended last year's Kodiak training. The first week began with Kodiak X on the Deschutes River in Oregon. Seven Venturers spent Sunday, the first day, taking turns leading the Commission 6 activities. By Monday, Kodiak X was completed and whitewater guide training and Wilderness First Aid began. Over the course of the week, Crew 360's instructors delivered specific river-related lessons they had prepared, and everyone had the opportunity to guide a paddle raft, row a stern frame raft and have fun in an inflatable kayak. Wilderness First Aid was open to the adults as well so several of us sharpened our skills as we listened and performed survival exercises each day.



Wilderness First Aid

At the end of the first week, we packed up all the gear and traveled to the Flathead River on the south side of Glacier National Park in Montana. Several Venturers left after the first week and more joined us for a Kodiak week on the beautiful Flathead. The Venturers who learned how to be whitewater rafting guides the first week took advantage of the second week for additional practice.



Kodiak Crew

On Sunday, we began Kodiak training. We had two Kodiak Crews, one of five and one of six participants. In previous years, we had three to four Kodiak Crews. Monday was our first day whitewater rafting on the river and we conducted our second commission over the course of the day.

The Flathead River was racing that first day, and we flipped two of our cargo rafts. Everyone was safe, but it took us a while before we rescued most of our gear. Since some of the sleeping gear and clothes were pretty well saturated, the youth decided to change our layover day from Wednesday to Tuesday and let everyone dry out and catch their breath. Normally we conduct two commissions on our layover day, so we adjusted Kodiak to complete commissions three and four on Tuesday. It worked out well as the camp location was good and we had plenty of sunshine to dry out everything.

By Wednesday, we were back on the river. We completed our final commission that day. Thursday was another river day, and at the end of the day, our plan was to present the Kodiak participants with their recognition. However, a raging wind storm caused us to hunker down for the evening. Friday morning, we did our recognition presentations and staff thank-yous, and we were back on the river again for our final day of rafting. As luck has it, the river had saved the best and most active water for last; the Venturers were all smiles every time they rode a new set of wild rapids.



Whitewater rafting on the Flathead River

Friday afternoon, we spent a few hours packing our gear and headed back to a nearby KOA campground to get cleaned up. Everyone had a great two weeks. Not only did we have a fabulous time on the river but we also all enjoyed unique learning opportunities, and the youth leaders gained experience that few young adults ever encounter.